

STEREOTYPE LAWS, &c. U. S.

JANUARY 4, 1832.

Mr. WHITE, of Louisiana, from the Committee on the Judiciary, made the following

REPORT:

The committee to whom was referred the proposals of the Printer to Congress to publish a stereotype edition of the Laws and Treaties of the United States, submit the following report:

By the act of the 3d of March 1795, the Secretary of State was directed to publish five thousand copies of the public acts and the treaties then in force, four thousand five hundred copies of which were divided among the respective States and Territories, for the purpose of depositing one copy in each county or subordinate civil division, as the Executive or Legislature thereof might deem most conducive to the general information of the people.

By the act of the 2d of March, 1799, the Secretary of State was required to publish five thousand copies of the acts of each session.

By the act of the 14th of April, 1814, the Secretary of State was authorized to purchase one thousand copies of the edition published by Bioren, Duane, and Weightman; and the act of the 20th of April, 1818, provides for the annual publication of eleven thousand copies of the pamphlet acts of each session.

During the session of 1828-'29, a select committee, to whom that subject was referred, made a report, of which the following are extracts:

“The citizens of the United States are blessed with a free government, with good institutions, and generally with good laws. To possess these laws is their peculiar privilege; and to understand that they may obey them, is a republican duty, the performance of which should admit of no excuse. The publication and distribution of the laws, their multiplicity and cheapness, are subjects obviously of deep interest. To enlightened men, who have at heart the purity and preservation of our republican institutions, it surely cannot be necessary to urge the importance of a general distribution and knowledge of the Constitution and laws of our common country. To deny this necessity will be to affirm that the unlettered and ignorant are capable of self government, and of appreciating and obeying laws they have never seen and do not understand.

“The signal advantages of stereotype plates are the accuracy and cheapness of subsequent editions of the work. In cases where the first edition pays for the plates, or where the price of the plates is not charged, the actual expense of every new edition, whether small or large, is the cost of the paper and presswork only.

“The Federal Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Ordinance of 1787, the deeds of cession from the several States, the Acts of Congress complete, whether public or private, and all the treaties, conventions and contracts with foreign Powers and with the Indian tribes, may, if done in brier type, be put into about twenty-five hundred pages; and if the treaties, conventions, and annual appropriation acts be in brier, and all the rest in small pica type, then less than four thousand pages would contain the whole.

“The bookstore price of a copy of the Laws (containing seven volumes) varies from \$35 to \$40. This is a price which but few men can afford to pay. It is too much for most professional men, and altogether beyond the means of the great body of our citizens.

“The high price of these law books is no cause of surprise. Small editions necessarily impose high prices; hence there are few buyers; and this limited sale acts upon the publishers; hence, probably, it is, that there are few or no publishers who will risk a large edition of a voluminous costly work, in order to reduce the price, by reducing the average of the cost and of the profits of the trade—because the expense would be too great, and often ruinous, should the edition remain unsold for any considerable time. At all events, the fact is incontestible, be the cause what it may, that a complete set of the Laws now costs, according to the bookstore price, from 35 to 40 dollars.

“There is one master principle, lying at the foundation of this republic, which ought never to be overlooked. It is this: Whatever has, at any time, acquired the authority of law by the action of any department of the Government, should be given to the people in an official, cheap, and permanent form, that they may know what the law has been and is. We know of but one way in which this can be accomplished, and that is, by publishing, from stereotype plates, a complete body of the Laws.

“No part of the law should be hid from the people. To exclude the private, and print the public acts only, is in effect to hide a part of the law from the people. Besides, private acts are not alone interesting to the individuals relieved. They often settle principles, and establish rules, which are exceedingly important to others, and which all ought to have the means of knowing. Moreover, in the wants that existed, and in the kind of relief afforded, it exhibits, in a manner peculiarly its own, no small portion of our domestic history.

“The history of our legislation is important to every citizen, whether in public or in private life. A knowledge of this history must be obtained from the statute books; it can be had nowhere else; nor from these books, without great perplexity and labor, unless all the acts are found in them, and arranged in the order in which they were passed. This order is natural. It is the order of time, and leads to certainty.

“Brief marginal references to the text of the law are allowable, because they are harmless. But historical comments, explanatory notes, and extrinsic matters of any kind, which have never had the authority of law, should be excluded, if for no other cause, simply for the reason that they never were law.”

The propriety of placing a copy of the laws within the reach of every citizen, and the necessity of placing one copy at least in every county in the several States and Territories, in accordance with the policy of the act of the 3d of March, 1795, must be obvious to all. The introduction of new States,

and the creation of many new counties, since the distribution, leaves a very large proportion unprovided with the laws.

Small editions necessarily impose high prices. Experience proves that no publisher is willing, on his own account, to risk a large edition, because the expense would be ruinous should the work remain long on hand unsold. The advantage of stereotype plates is, that although the cost in the first place is greater, yet several editions can be published from the same plates, and the saving of composition and capital reduces the expense. Hence, although the present price of a copy of the Laws and Treaties in the bookstores is from 35 to 40 dollars, the publisher proposes to deliver them at 10, or at most \$12 50 per copy. Another consideration, which has had its weight with the committee, is, that the subscription of the Government will enable the publisher to defray the expense of the plates, and to furnish copies to private citizens at the same reduced price.

